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SUBJECT: CANADA: PM MARTIN'S SEEKS TO STRENGTHEN COMMERCIAL TIES AND HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE IN ASIA TRIP

REF: OTTAWA 00174

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: PM Paul Martin traveled to Thailand, Sri Lanka, India, Japan and China January 15-23 on a whirlwind tour that mixed tsunami relief with commercial relations. Some of the stops were photo ops or courtesy calls and critics questioned whether anything could be accomplished in such a rapid-fire trip. But there were substantive meetings as well, especially in China, and drawing attention to Canada's ties with the world's largest emerging economies looked good to export-oriented Canadians. On most ports of call the PM was also embroiled in controversy, some of which followed Martin from Canada. In Sri Lanka attention was drawn to his meeting with supporters of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam and in India a high-profile religious leader questioned his same-sex marriage proposal. In China a Conservative MP drew attention to Martin's seemingly light stance on human rights, and Martin lashed out at statements made by Opposition Leader Stephen Harper on same-sex marriage that made it appear the PM was ready to call an election over the issue. PM Martin returned to a week of preparations before the opening of Parliament at the end of the month.
END SUMMARY

12. (SBU) Prime Minister Paul Martin traveled to Asia January 15-23. The trip was originally scheduled for India, Japan and China but in the wake of the tsunami disaster, stops to Thailand and Sri Lanka were added. Conservative Deputy House Leader Jason Kenney traveled with the PM. (Comment: Kenney's key function appeared to be highlighting the PM's contradictions and missteps. End Comment).

13. (SBU) The Prime Minister stopped first in Thailand on January 16 for a short visit. Martin had a very brief meeting with Thailand's Interior Minister and a slightly longer visit with Canadian and Thai relief volunteers, including a long visit with the RCMP forensic team that has been deployed there to identify bodies.

TAMIL MEETINGS STIR CONTROVERSY

14. (SBU) The next stop was Sri Lanka on January 17, where the PM visited disaster areas near Kalmunai. Local media reports that the PM was significantly moved by the devastation he witnessed but the visit was soon overcome by controversy. Even before meeting with officials of the Sri Lankan government, Martin met with members of the Tamil National Alliance, a mouthpiece for the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam. Two of the officials he met, Joseph Pararajasingham and Gajendrakumar Ponnambalan, were recently banned from entering Canada because of suspicions that they would use the trip to raise money for the LTTE. Jason Kenney pointed out the apparent conflict in meeting officials who are not allowed to enter Canada for alleged connections to terrorist groups. Media reported that TNA officials pressed the Prime Minister to give charitable status to the Tamil Rehabilitation Organization, an association that the Canadian Security Intelligence Service says is a front for the LTTE.

15. (SBU) Prime Minister Martin justified the meeting by saying he wanted to raise the issue of child soldiers and to seek assurances that aid money was not filtered to the Tigers. TNA representatives were unapologetic, saying to reporters it was natural for the Tigers to offer shelter to children orphaned by the tsunami and the Tigers did not steal aid money for military use because they stole what they needed from the Sri Lankans. The Prime Minister followed the meeting with the TNA officials with a forty-five minute visit with the President of Sri Lanka, Chandrika Kumaratunga. That visit did not produce any joint declarations or announcements but local media reported that Kumaratunga reviewed with Martin some of the LTTE's history, including the use of child suicide bombers.

16. (SBU) In connection with the Prime Minister's visit with the Tamil officials, national media in Canada reported strong connections between Canada's Tamil community and the Liberal Party of Canada. Liberal MP Jim Karygiannis paid for his own trip to LTTE controlled parts of Sri Lanka before the Prime Minister's trip and he visited TRO offices there. Former Immigration Minister Judy Sgro also announced her intention before her departure to send Canadian Immigration officials

to LTTE areas despite the protests of the Sri Lankan government. (Note: Both of these MPs are from Toronto ridings where their nominations and election could be effected by the Tamil community. Most of the influence of the Tamil community is related to population distribution and political organization. Concentrated in the Toronto area, the Tamil community is reportedly in a position to influence ten Liberal riding associations. Not only do Liberal MPs in those ridings have to consider this voting block in general elections, as Liberals the Tamils also influence who is chosen as the riding,s candidate. End Note)

SAME-SEX MARRIAGE CONTROVERSY TRAVELS WITH PM

17. (SBU) Problems also followed the Prime Minister to India on his next stop. Martin held meetings with India,s Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Prime Minister, as well as a courtesy call on the President. The controversy came from an Indian newspaper article by Jathedar Giani Joginder Singh Vedanti, who is described by Canadian national media as the equivalent of the Pope in the Sikh religion. Jethdar Vedanti declared his opposition to the Canadian same-sex marriage proposal and suggested Sikhs around the world should protest. At least one of a group of Canadian Sikh MPs traveling with Prime Minister Martin, MP Gurbax Malhi, said he would abide by the Jathedar,s declaration. Others were less enthused, with MP Navdeep Bains and Health Minister Ujjal Dosanjh rejecting the declaration, and MP Ruby Dhalla admitting the Jethdar,s opinion has weight in the Sikh community, but saying she would still vote in favor of the same-sex marriage proposal. While not necessarily timed to coincide with this exchange, the Conservative Party concurrently unveiled a campaign on the same-sex marriage issue that is targeted to garner support in metropolitan ethnic communities across Canada. Conservative Communications Director Jeff Norquay told POL FSN that the campaign was long planned as a build-up to Parliament's return but the coincidence of the Jathedar,s comment was welcome. In the end, the Prime Minister and his Indian counterpart released a fairly routine Joint Declaration covering their meetings on tsunami relief, the G-20, democracy in Afghanistan, and peace talks with Pakistan.

BUSINESS AND BEEF IN JAPAN

18. (SBU) In Japan January 19-20, the Prime Minister attended a gathering with the Japanese Business Federation and held a fairly straightforward meeting with Prime Minister Koizumi. Along with declarations about commitments to tsunami relief, and promoting trade, peace and prosperity in Asia, Prime Minister Martin was able to secure a commitment from Prime Minister Koizumi to seek a science-based resolution to Japan,s ban on Canadian beef imports, even though PM Koizumi was unsuccessful in gaining Canada,s support for a Security Council seat. Local media reported that critics later questioned the depth of meaning in the term science-based,, however.

HUMAN RIGHTS AND SAME-SEX MARRIAGE AGAIN IN CHINA

19. (SBU) The PM began his visit to China late on January 20 with a delegation of Canadian business leaders, who joined for this leg of the trip. With 360 members, the size of the private sector tag-alongs suggests that Martin hoped to accomplish something concrete in China. Despite an apparent intent by the PM to focus on trade issues, however, unrelated news took the spotlight. While the PM was highlighting China,s progress in reducing human rights abuses, the Chinese government was in the middle of a media crackdown to prevent public mourning of the late Communist Party leader, Zhao Ziyang. This gave Conservative MP Jason Kenney an opening to attack the Prime Minister. Kenney stated that Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and the U.S. State Department had all published reports recently saying human rights conditions were deteriorating in China. He also made his way to the Zhao home to give flowers and offer condolences, drawing considerable media attention that was not appreciated by his hosts. Martin protested Kenney,s actions to the Canadian media, saying they were disrespectful to the Zhao family. On January 20, Canadian journalists (CTV) at the Zhao home were detained and questioned until their Press Pool passes identified them as Canadian media with the Prime Minister,s party and they were released (see reftel).

110. (SBU) The same-sex marriage issue also followed Martin to China. In response to a media question about statements made by Conservative leader Stephen Harper, Martin stated &if the question you're asking is, am I ready to go into an election to support the Charter of Rights against those who want to attack it, the answer is absolutely yes.8 Harper immediately spun this to mean that the Prime Minister would call an election if the bill failed and he further suggested

that the Prime Minister was threatening Liberal Backbenchers to support the measure. In Canada, Prime Minister,s Office spokesperson Marc Roy indicated that the vote would not be declared a confidence motion that would mandate an election if it were to fail.

11. (SBU) COMMENT: Prime Minister Martin keeps an extremely busy schedule while traveling) one journalist said the PM would make a drill sergeant proud) and this trip was true to form. Despite the distraction of domestic issues that followed the PM to Asia it appears to have been a productive trip. The PM was the first head of state to visit the tsunami affected region and he was able to create serious

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openings on the economic and commercial front, while broadening engagement with the important emerging power that Canada,s new foreign policy recognizes as key to its interests and to global stability. The one concrete achievement was a tourism agreement with China which will allow groups of Chinese citizens to visit Canada, a deal potentially worth millions to Canada's tourism industry. Septel will focus on Canada-China relations. END COMMENT

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